

The Importance of the **FAITH FAMILY** During Deployment

**By Chaplain
(Captain) Norris
Burkes, 162nd
Combat
Communications
Group**

*Chaplain
Burkes is a
syndicated
columnist with
Gannet News
Service.*

During the past several months, thousands of military personnel have deployed overseas. As more prepare to follow, there are concrete ways in which your faith family can help your family as you are deployed. I know because two years ago, I was on the receiving end of that help.

With my deployment scheduled a few days after Thanksgiving, our family spent the weekend stuffing Turkey and exchanging Christmas gifts. Though Thanksgiving was short of its usual thankfulness, we were grateful for the church family who rallied behind us.

Their encouragement toward me began with a Dedication Service two weeks prior to my departure. Our senior chaplain laid hands on the heads of each family member and prayed for them by name. Chapel members echoed prayers responsively.

Once in Saudi Arabia, my chapel mounted a campaign of care and prayer. E-mail poured in with offers to help do anything I may have forgotten at home. The offers of help avoided the cliché, "Let me know if there's anything I can do," by specifically asking, "What needs to be done?"

Members e-mailed pictures of my family at chapel events to remind me of my family's strength and resourcefulness. The notes sent from WWII vets thanking me for serving humbled me. Care packages sent with toiletries or brownies never lost their ability to boost morale.

Meanwhile at home, chapel support for my family was unwavering. My wife wrote to tell me how the men's group offered constant help. Once, when my wife hesitated to bother the men with a weeklong mechanical problem, the men lovingly scolded her for not calling sooner and teasingly made her promise to mend her independent ways.

Chapel members made sure temptations were minimized on my home front too. No visits were ever made by unaccompanied men. My mind was eased to hear my wife report that "John and Betty came for a visit." Or when the men's group fixed something, she was able to write that "John, Joe and Jim fixed the shower head."

The best thing chapel members did was to provide occasional child care. My wife taught school and these respites allowed her study time, prayer time, rejuvenation, and even some recreation. They also provided social outlets for my children.

After I was home a few days, my wife realized that she had missed good adult conversation. So on the subsequent deployment of other chapel members, she made sure to invite the family for a pool party where the children played and we talked to the spouse left behind.

Our chapel implemented a remarkable strategy of caring for me and my family, and it showed no sign of slowing when I returned. They sent a welcome basket, provided more child care, and gave us privacy for the next ten days.

When I did return to the chapel, I was welcomed back into the family of God with a prayer time and more hugs than I can ever remember getting on one day. It was Thanksgiving all over again! 🐾